

CLIPPER SPORTS

Sabres open season with pair of wins

By Tony Zerucha

The Springfield Sabres have opened the 2024 Winnipeg High School Football League season with convincing wins over a pair of division rivals.

On Sept. 6 the Sabres earned a 35-0 win over Murdoch Mackay in Oakbank. A smothering defence and strong running game, two team trademarks, were on full display.

Springfield controlled field position throughout the game. Their offence consistently penetrated deep into Murdoch Mackay's end, and the defence kept them there. Grade 12 linebacker Ethan Haarsma, fresh off a strong summer performance with Team Manitoba, led the way with nine tackles and a recovered fumble for a touchdown. He ran for three more.

The Sabres' front seven put constant pressure on Murdoch Mackay's offence, plugging the middle. When they tried to run wide, there was little room. On the few occasions when Murdoch Mackay had time to pass, Springfield's secondary closed gaps, with Brady Rach and Keagan Kane intercepting passes.

"I think our DBs have been doing really good," Grade 12 linebacker Colton Gowans said. "They put in the work in practice and have listened to coaches. There's been great improvement from them."

The Sabres' ground game was multi-faceted, establishing an outside presence early. When Murdoch Mackay adjusted, so did Springfield, which pounded the ball up the middle in the second half. Mitchell Magwood had four rushes for 64 yards, while Brock Tabin carried the rock seven times for 84 yards and a touchdown.

Magwood said Springfield likes to use its heavy formation to pound the ball up the middle. Running the ball outside keeps defences on their toes.

"Our outside and inside runs were great," Magwood said. "We had lots of first downs. It was never an issue."

However, it wasn't a perfect performance. Haarsma, Gowans, Magwood and offensive lineman Caden Perkin said the Sabres took too many penalties.

"We just need to clean up some things," Magwood said. "Eliminate a few blocks to the back, holding and offsides, and we'll be a better team."

"That's probably the most penalties we've had from an SCI team in a long time," head coach Tom Walls said. "That's concerning, but the good news is it's clearly something we can improve upon. It's not like we got beat by a team that's physically better than us and there's nothing we can do about it."

Walls said that simple adjustment kept the running game moving ahead.

"They were plugging the middle so we ran to the outside," he explained. "When they adjusted to the outside, we started running (Tabin) to the inside. Toward the end of the game, those holes were much bigger. It was trying to take advantage of where the defence was lining up."

In addition to Murdoch Mackay, the Sabres share a division with the Miles Macdonell Buckeyes, River East Kodiaks and Kildonan East Reivers. Those Reivers were unlucky on Sept. 13, falling 28-10 to the Sabres, with a last-minute touchdown narrowing the gap.

Magwood posted 190 total yards. Tabin ran for 70, while Korbin Meadows Seidler scampered for 15.

Rach picked off another pass and made seven tackles. Haarsma had nine tackles and another for a loss, Gowans, who recently committed to the University of Manitoba Bisons, had 11 tackles.

Springfield has drawn tough opponents for their three out-of-division contests. They face the powerhouse Oak Par Raiders along with the Grant Park Pirates and Maples Marauders.

On Sept. 20, the Sabres visit the 1-1 Buckeyes at 5 p.m. at Falcons' Field. Springfield's next home game is against the Pirates on Sept. 26 at 5 p.m. They close out the regular season with a home tilt against the Kodiaks at 4:30 p.m. on Oct. 18.



Photo submitted
Brock Tabin carried the rock seven times for 84 yards and a touchdown against Murdoch Mackay.



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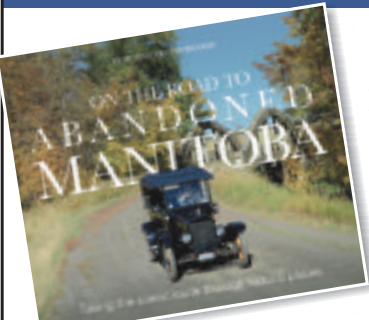
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